

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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DEPT PASS EXIM

ABIDJAN FOR REDSO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRN, BEXP, GB, US

SUBJ: TRANSGABON RAILROAD

REF: STATE 130044

1. SUMMARY. NEW OCTRA DIRECTOR MASSON EXPLAINS
TRANSGABON RAILROAD BID REVIEW PROCESS AND CONFIRMS THAT
SOFRRERAIL/TAMS CONSORTIUM HAS BEEN CHOSEN AS CONSULTANT
ENGINEERS. END SUMMARY.

2. HAD LONG CONVERSATION WITH NEW OCTRA DIRECTOR MASSON
WHO EXPLAINED HIS PLANS FOR BID REVIEW AS FOLLOWS:
OCTRA WILL BOLSTER ITS DEPLETED STAFF WITH A FEW
EXPERTS MASSON HAS HAND-PICKED IN FRANCE AND BID
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REVIEW PROCESS WILL BE CONDUCTED JOINTLY BY THESE

EXPERTS, FOREIGN EXPERTS SENT HERE AS PART OF THE MULTINATIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS (MRCE), PLUS A FEW EXPERTS FROM SOFRERAIL/TAMS ENGINEERING CONSULTING CONSORTIUM. THESE VARIOUS EXPERTS WILL BE ASSIGNED TO DIFFERENT LOTS OR GROUPS OF LOTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR COMPETENCE AND MASSON'S ORGANIZATIONAL PLANS AND WILL REVIEW BIDS AND EVALUATE THEM FOR MASSON. LATTER WILL THEN ARRIVE AT HIS OWN CONCLUSIONS ON BASIS OF TECHNICAL ADVICE SUBMITTED TO HIM BY THE VARIOUS EXPERTS AND MAKE HIS OWN RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOG (I.E. BONGO) FOR ULTIMATE DECISION.

3. MASSON READILY AGREED WITH ME THAT (A) ENGINEERING CONSULTANT GROUP SHOULD BE USED TO BID REVIEW STAGE AND (B) MRCE CONCEPT SOMEWHAT UNREALISTIC AND UNLIKELY TO

PRODUCE VERY MANY QUALIFIED EXPERTS. MASSON'S PLANS CALL FOR HAVING SOMEONE FROM SOFRERAIL ASSIST IN REVIEW OF BIDS CONCERNED WITH FURNISHING OF MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT AND AN EXPERT FROM TAMS ASSIST IN REVIEW OF BIDS CONCERNED WITH FURNISHING OF MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT AND AN EXPERT FROM TAMS ASSIST IN REVIEW OF BIDS CONCERNED WITH LOT 3 (I.E. ACTUAL CONSTRUCTION WORK). HE INSISTING THAT AT LEAST ONE ITALIAN AND ONE AMERICAN BE PROVIDED BY SOFRERAIL/TAMS CONSORTIUM. THESE ENGINEERING CONSULTING EXPERTS, TOGETHER WITH OCTRA EXPERTS WHICH MASSON BRINGING, SHOULD PROVIDE ACTUAL MINIMUM NECESSARY FOR EVALUATING BIDS ACCORDING TO MASSON. MRCE EXPERTS WILL BE HELPFUL IN PROVIDING ADDITIONAL EXPERTISE TO THE EXTENT THEY CAN BE FOUND.

4. WITH REGARD TO QUESTION OF AMERICAN EXPERTS ON MRCE, MASSON STATED THAT HE REALIZED THAT OBTAINING THREE QUALIFIED FRENCH-SPEAKING AMERICANS FOR THREE MONTHS UNREALISTIC AND ALSO UNNECESSARY. HE CONSIDERED THAT MOST DESIRABLE SOLUTION WOULD BE ONE AMERICAN EXPERT FOR MONTH OF JULY, QUALIFIED TO ASSIST IN REVIEW OF BIDS FOR FURNISHING OF EQUIPMENT AND ONE AMERICAN EXPERT FOR MONTH OF AUGUST WHO WOULD BE A SPECIALIST IN CONSTRUCTION WORK FOR REVIEW OF LOT 3. EXPERTS FROM PRIVATE SECTOR WOULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BE ACCEPTED BUT MASSON INDICATED PREFERENCE FOR GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS.

5. MASSON ESTIMATED THAT FINAL DECISIONS ON ALL LOGS WOULD BE TAKEN IN SEPTEMBER AFTER ALL BIDS RECEIVED. FINAL SELECTION WHICH WOULD TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION BOTH TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF BIDS AND FINANCING CONSIDERATIONS WOULD BE MADE ESSENTIALLY BY HIM AND

SUBMITTED TO GOG.

6. MASSON STATED THAT FED FINANCING NOW FIRM (SEPTTEL) AND WRITTEN COMMITMENT ON FRENCH FINANCING WOULD RAPIDLY FOLLOW. HE SAID HE WOULD RECOMMEND THAT MINISTER RAWIRI MAKE TRIP TO OTHER DONOR COUNTRIES THIS SUMMER TO FIRM UP THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER AT WHICH TIME A DONOR'S MEETING WILL BE CALLED TO FINALIZE CONTRIBUTIONS PRIOR TO (OR SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH) ACTUAL ALLOCATION OF CONTRACTS. (MASSON DOES NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF REGROUPING FIRMS, WHO HAVE BID SEPARATELY, AT THAT TIME.)

7. CONTRACTS COULD THEN BE LET OUT IN OCTOBER AND ACTUAL WORK COULD START SYMBOLICALLY ON DECEMBER 30 BUT REALISTICALLY WOULD PROBABLY NOT BEGIN UNTIL MARCH OF 1975.

8. MASSON CONFIRMED THAT SOFRERAIL/TAMS GROUP HAD BEEN DEFINITELY SELECTED FOR ENGINEERING CONSULTING WORK AND THAT THIS DECISION TAKEN BY PRESIDENT BONGO. MASSON EXPECTED THAT TAMS AND BCEOM WOULD FURNISH MOST OF EXPERTS WHO WOULD COME TO GABON SINCE THEY ARE THE TWO MEMBERS OF CONSORTIUM WITH GREATEST EXPERIENCE IN CONSTRUCTION WORK.

9. MASSON ENVISAGES THAT ACTUAL CONSTRUCTION WORK IN FIELD WILL BE SUPERVISED JOINTLY BY EXPERTS FROM ENGINEERING CONSULTING GROUP, WHO WILL ACT ESSENTIALLY AS "FUNCTIONAL" EXPERTS, AND REPRESENTATIVES OF OCTRA WHO WILL BE ON-SPOT AS COORDINATORS WORKING WITH ENGINEERING CONSULTING GROUP AND REPORTING DIRECTLY TO HIM. WHEN I EXPRESSED FEAR THAT THIS ORGANIZATION MIGHT LEAD TO CONFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND POSSIBLE CONFLICTS, MASSON REPLIED THAT HE HAD HIMSELF WORKED IN PAST WITH ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM AND WAS CONFIDENT THAT HE COULD ENSURE SMOOTH AND EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK OF EVERYONE INVOLVED.

10. COMMENT: MASSON AS WELL AS GOG WELL AWARE OF MY OWN RECOMMENDATION THAT ENGINEERING CONSULTING GROUP CHOSEN BE GIVEN FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR REVIEW OF TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF BIDS AND SUBMITTING THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOG VIA OCTRA. IN MY TALK WITH MASSON I USED ARGUMENTS REFTTEL WHICH I HAD ALREADY USED WITH GOG.

11. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT MASSON (ACTING UNDER MANDATE FROM GOG) INTENDS TO RUN SHOW WITH FIRM HAND. MRCE APPEARS LARGELY DESIGNED TO GIVE ASSISTANCE AND MULTINATIONAL COLORING TO OCTRA

OPERATION. REORGANIZING OBVIOUS LOGIC OF BRINGING IN
ENGINEERING CONSULTING CONSORTIUM, MASON HAS DEVISED
ABOVE ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN FOR BID REVIEW WHICH ALSO
INCLUDES SOFRERAIL/TAMS GROUP.

12. WHILE MASSON'S PLANS MAY BE LESS SATISFACTORY THAN
WE MIGHT HAVE WISHED, BELIEVE THAT THERE IS NOT MUCH
MORE THAT WE CAN DO. I HAVE STRONGLY PRESENTED USG
VIEWPOINT TO GABONESE IN TALKS WITH BONGO, RAWIRI, BOUMAH,
KASSA MAPSI AND OTHERS AS WELL AS TO VION AND NOW MASSON.
LATTER HAS EFFECTIVELY UNDERCUT OUR BEST ARGUMENT BY
BRINGING IN SOFRERAIL/TAMS AS PARTICIPANTS IN PROCESS
EVEN THOUGH WITH SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES.

13. BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD MAKE BEST OF SITUATION, AND SEEK
TO PROVIDE ONE FRENCH-SPEAKING EXPERT IN RAILROAD EQUIPMENT
FOR JULY AND ONE FRENCH-SPEAKING EXPERT IN CONSTRUCTION
WORK DURING AUGUST. THEY SHOULD COME FROM USG, IF
POSSIBLE, BUT PRIVATE INDUSTRY EXPERTS WOULD BE BETTER
THAN NONE AT ALL.
MCKESSON

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